

I. INTRODUCTION

Tunica County, Mississippi is located thirty-five (35) miles south of Memphis, Tennessee and is part of the Memphis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). It is bounded to the west by the Mississippi River, to the north by DeSoto County, Mississippi, to the east by Tate County, Mississippi and to the south by Coahoma and Quitman Counties in Mississippi (See Exhibit 1).

Tunica County, with an area of 460 square miles, was one of ten (10) counties created in 1836 from Chickasaw Indian territory that was ceded to the United States in 1816. The Town of Tunica is the only incorporated area in the County, but there are several unincorporated communities such as Robinsonville, Dundee and Hollywood. Tunica County is Mississippi River Delta country, with catfish ponds and acres of the nation's richest farmland planted in cotton, rice and soybeans.



Prior to the early 1990's, Tunica County was primarily known as one of the poorest counties in the United States. That began to change in 1990 when the State of Mississippi passed legislation to allow dockside gaming

operations on a local county option basis for the counties along the Mississippi River and the Gulf Coast. In October 1992, Splash Casino, the first in Tunica County, opened to long lines of anxiously awaiting crowds. It was the beginning of what has since been described as "The Tunica Miracle."

The first casinos in Tunica County (Splash, President's and Bally's) docked at Mhoon Landing west of the Town of Tunica near Tunica Lake. Later development moved casino operations to the Robinsonville area in the northern portion of the County, approximately twelve (12) miles closer to Memphis than Mhoon Landing. The Mhoon Landing casinos closed, moved to the Robinsonville area or moved to other markets during 1994 and 1995. At the present time, there are nine (9) casinos operating in northern Tunica County: Bally's, Fitzgerald's, Grand, Goldstrike, Harrah's, Hollywood, Horseshoe, Sam's Town and Sheraton. Stiff competition between the casinos has generated millions of dollars in improvements for such things as hotels, golf courses and theaters for live shows.



According to an April 2000 study by Ethridge & Associates for the Tunica County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tunica is the nation's third largest gaming destination, trailing only Las Vegas, Nevada and Atlantic City, New Jersey. More than ten (10) million tourists visit the County each year and stay an average of 3.4 nights. More than 75% of those surveyed indicated that they would visit Tunica County again.

However, casino development has not completely taken over Tunica County. Even with the arrival of the casinos and related development in the last ten (10) years, the County remains rural with approximately 98% in agricultural production.

The 2000 Federal Census counted only 9,227 permanent residents in Tunica County (including the 1,132 residents of the Town of Tunica), while casino operations employ nearly 15,000 people. The "temporary" population created by casino employees and visitors contrasts to some degree with the permanent population, the majority of whom are lifelong residents with long family histories in the County. Many casino employees commute to Tunica from Memphis and adjacent DeSoto and Tate Counties.

Tunica County and the Town of Tunica receive a portion of gaming revenues every year. Of the twelve (12) percent State tax on gaming revenue, four (4) percent goes to Tunica County (shared with the Town of Tunica) and eight (8) percent goes to the State of Mississippi. Tunica County spends most of its portion on road

improvements, water and sewer improvements and the development of community facilities in accordance with State Law.

Casino development has provided numerous benefits to the County but has also brought many challenges, particularly in terms of land use. These challenges will continue into the future as the County faces such issues as diversifying the economic base, providing adequate services to all citizens and increasing the permanent residential population. One of the tools that the County will use to face these challenges is a Comprehensive Plan that will provide a clear guide for future land use and development decisions.

Purpose

The purpose of the Tunica County Comprehensive Plan is to promote the health, safety, morals and general welfare of the community, in accordance with State law. It exists to conserve property values, encourage appropriate land use throughout the County and bring about coordinated physical development in accordance with present and future needs. It is intended to provide a framework for future planning decisions and achievement of the County's identified goals.

Scope

The Mississippi Code of 1972 grants municipalities and counties the authority to provide for the "preparation, adoption, amendment, extension and implementation of a comprehensive plan" for the purpose of "bringing about coordinated physical develop-

ment in accordance with present and future needs." A comprehensive plan is defined in the Mississippi Code as "a statement of public policy for the physical development of the entire municipality or county adopted by resolution of the governing body." The comprehensive plan must include, at minimum, the following elements:

- Goals and objectives for a twenty (20) to twenty-five (25) year period that address residential, commercial and industrial development, parks, open space and recreation, road improvements, public schools and community facilities.
- A land use plan that designates the proposed general distribution and extent of the uses of land for residences, commerce, industry, recreation, open space and public facilities.
- A transportation plan depicting in map form the proposed functional classifications (e.g. major road, collector road, local road) for all existing and proposed streets, roads and highways for the area included in the land use plan and for the same time period as covered in the land use plan.
- A community facilities plan as a basis for a capital improvements program that includes housing, schools, parks and recreation, public facilities, utilities and drainage improvements.

In addition to the minimum requirements, the Tunica County Comprehensive Plan will include elements re-

lated to airport area development, aesthetics and tourism.

Tunica County, like many communities around the country, understood that if managed correctly, tourism would not only expand the community's range of economic prospects, but also play a critical role in expanding the quality of life aspects for Tunica residents. This understanding of tourism's role and its future importance for Tunica County required that it be considered in the general planning process.

The Comprehensive Plan for Tunica County covers a twenty (20) year period from 2002 to 2022 for the unincorporated portions of the County. A Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Tunica was prepared in conjunction with this Plan.

The following chapters will describe the planning process, document existing conditions, establish goals and objectives and describe recommended plans and implementation strategies.

EXHIBIT 1.
VICINITY MAP
TUNICA COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

